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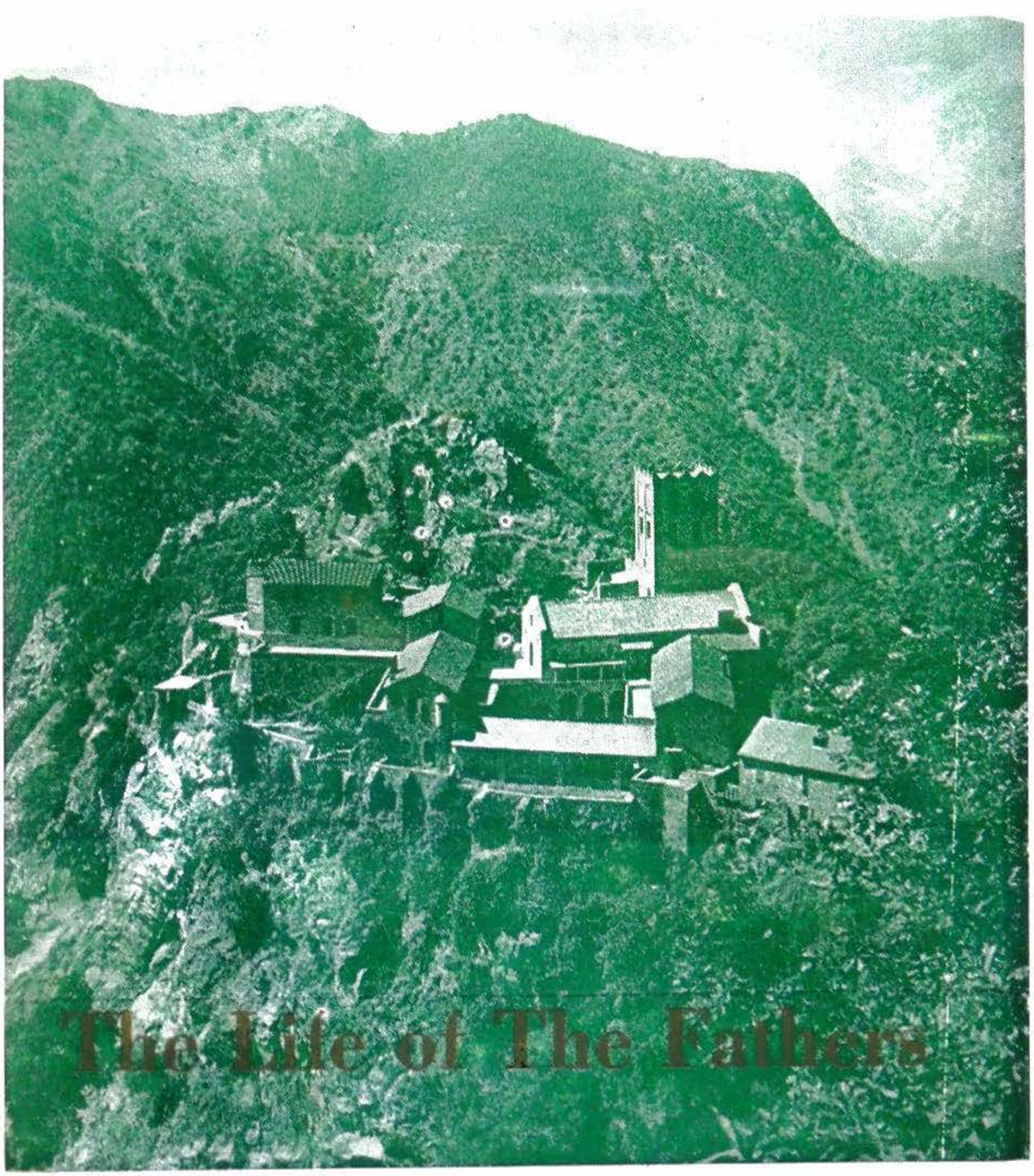
THE

November - December Seventy Cents



The Life of The Fathers

by St. Gregory of Tours

THE ORTHODOX WORD

A Bimonthly Periodical

OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF
SAINT HERMAN OF ALASKA

Established with the blessing of His Eminence the late *John* (*Maximovitch*), Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

PLATINA, CALIFORNIA 96076

1975, Vol. 11, no. 6 (65)
November - December

ISSN 0030-5839

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COVER: The 10th-century monastery of St. Martin at Canigou in the south of France (Roussillon): a fruit of the last period of Orthodox Gaul's monastic fervor, whose flourishing period of the 5th and 6th centuries is described by St. Gregory of Tours in *The Life of the Fathers*. Pages 223 and 224: from G. Fraipont, *Auvergne,* Paris, c. 1910.

MICROFILM copies of all back issues and of individual articles are available from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI., 48106.

Copyright 1975 by The Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.

Published bimonthly by The Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. Second-class postage paid at Platina, California. Yearly subscription $5, two years $9, three years $12. Office of Publication: Beegum Gorge Road, Platina, California.

All inquiries should be directed to:
THE ORTHODOX WORD, PLATINA, CALIFORNIA, 96076, U.S.A.

A major work of Orthodox hagiography from the 6th century by a great Orthodox Saint of the West. Never before translated into Greek, Russian, or English, it is here presented in serial form and dedicated to the Blessed Memory of Archbishop John Maximovitch, himself the most recent of the great Orthodox Hierarchs of Gaul and new Apostle to the lands of the West, on the tenth anniversary of his repose.

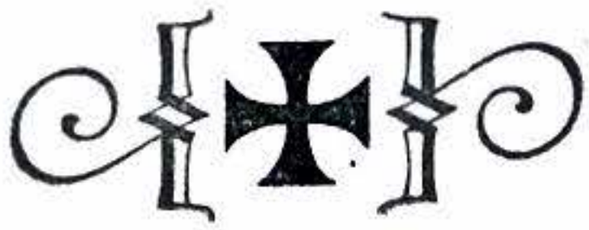
The Life of The FATHERS

(VITA PATRUM)

by

St. Gregory of Tours

First English Translation by
The St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood



The Life of The Fathers

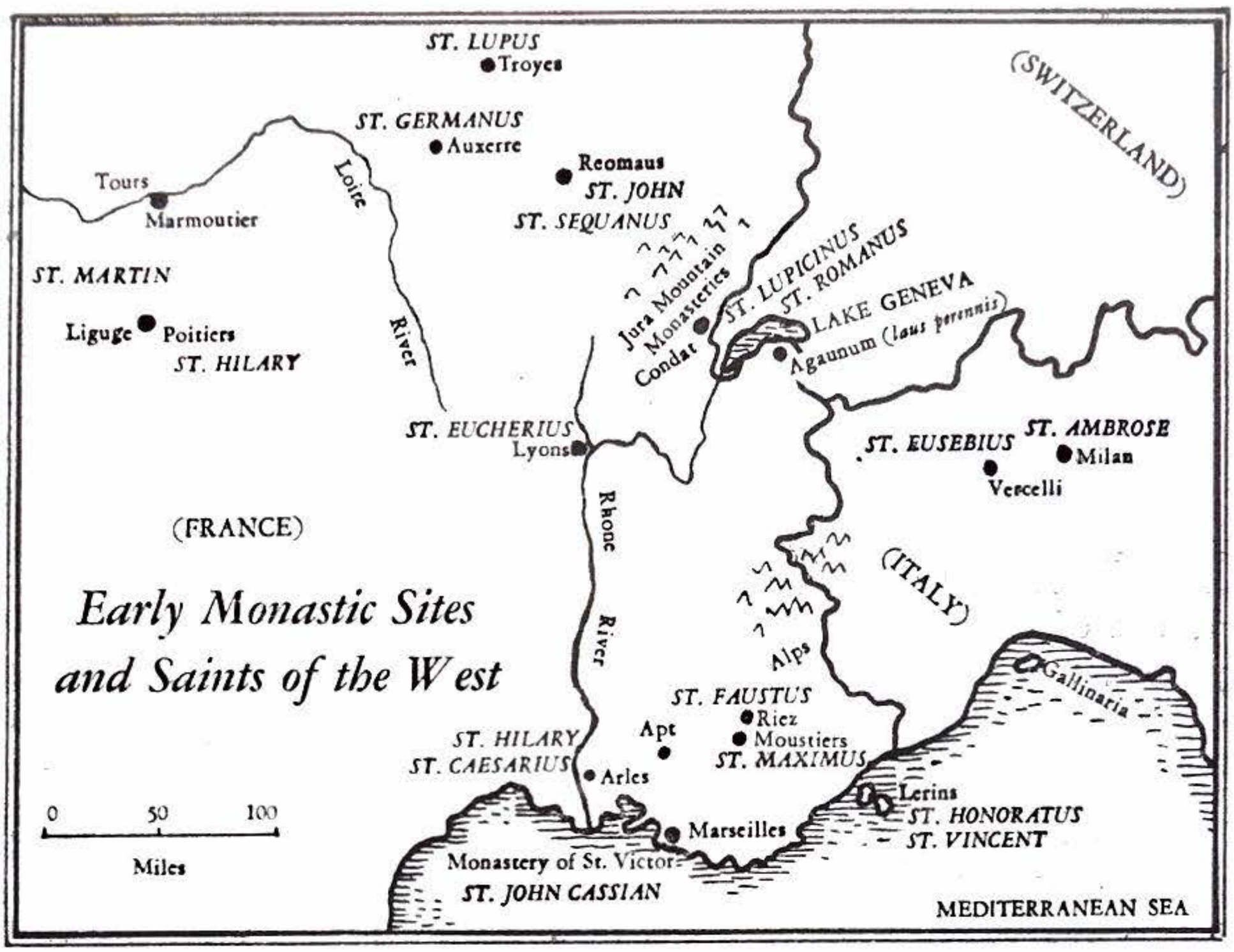
by

St. Gregory of Tours

539 - 594

THE LIFE OF THE FATHERS is one of the last of the many works of St. Gregory on the saints of Christ's Church. Completed only a year or so before his death (593), it contains accounts of monastic saints which are rather more detailed than his earlier works on martyrs and confessors, and much closer to what we would now call the *Lives* of saints. The book is of special value as an original source because many of the saints therein were known to him personally (the others having lived no more than about a century before his lifetime), and three of them were his own close relatives: his great-grandfather St. Gregory, Bishop of Langres (ch. 7), his granduncle St. Nicetius, Bishop of Lyons (ch. 8), and his uncle St. Gallus, Bishop of Clermont (ch. 6). The last part of this Introduction will place the Fathers whose Lives St. Gregory gives (most of the rest of them being abbots and hermits) in the whole context of the monasticism and Orthodoxy of 6th-century Gaul, which has its roots in the great Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries: St. Martin of Tours, St. John Cassian of Marseilles, and the Fathers of the island monastery of Lerins.

The purpose of the Lives of saints is not to give abstract knowledge but, as St. Gregory himself often states in his works, to edify spiritually and to inspire to imitation. Thus it is that the surest proof of the value of St. Gregory's writings is his own life, which was wholly inspired by the saints he so loved.



The Life of St. Gregory is in itself a remarkable document. Its author is identified in the manuscripts only as "Abbot Odo," evidently the Abbot Odo (879-942) who was a monk at St. Martin's monastery in Tours in the early years of the tenth century and wrote hymns in the Saint's praise, later becoming the second abbot of Cluny. The *Life* is remarkable in that it is almost entirely taken from the works of St. Gregory himself, who often spoke of his own experiences, and therefore has something of the value of an *autobiography* of a saint, wherein we can see clearly his temptations as well as the manifestations of God's grace in him. St. Gregory's descriptions of what he himself witnessed are so simple and straightforward that they are very moving for us today in our age of "sophistication" and lies. Abbot Odo usually paraphrases and condenses his excerpts from St. Gregory's works, but even so their original power shines through; and the Abbot's own comments show him to be a man of spiritual perception himself, handing down to us through the centuries the memory of one who — as the Orthodox reader will readily see — easily ranks with the great Fathers of Orthodox piety.

The complete *Life* is given here, presented for the first time in the English language. The titles of the sections and the footnotes have been added by the editors.

The Life of St. Gregory of Tours

By ABBOT ODO†

PREFACE

IT IS RIGHT to venerate the memory of all the saints; but the faithful honor in the first place those who, whether by their doctrine or by their example have shone with greater splendor than the others. Now, that the blessed Gregory, archbishop of the metropolitan see of Tours, was one of these, and that he is resplendent with this double merit, is proved by documents which are by no means of negligible authority. It is therefore surely necessary to describe, even though incompletely, his actions, so that the renown of such a man may not be eclipsed one day by a cloud of uncertainty. Without doubt it suffices for his glory that he has, high in the heavens, the testimony of Christ, Whom he wished to please; but among us would it not, nonetheless, be something culpable to keep silent the praises of the man who exerted himself to publish those of so many saints? No matter how long this brief account might be, all these high deeds will not be related therein, because, neglecting several things which tradition recounts, we shall limit ourselves to a small number of those which are attested by his own books. If one demands miracles of him, measuring, in the manner of the Jews, the sanctity of each person by the number of his miracles — then what is one to think of the blessed Mother of God or St. John the Forerunner?* Let us judge more soundly and know that at the dreadful day of judgment many of those who have worked miracles will be rejected, and only those who have given themselves over to works of righteousness will be received at the right hand of the Sovereign Judge. Therefore, it is not for having worked miracles that we recommend our Metropolitan — even though his life is by no means utterly devoid of them — but we hope to demonstrate that he, meek and humble of heart, walked in the steps of Christ.

1. THE SAINT'S PARENTAGE

GREGORY WAS A NATIVE of the Celtic region of the Gauls; he was born in the land of Auvergne. His father was Florentius, his mother Armentaria; and, as if nobility in this world approached in some respect the Divine generosity, his parents were rich in goods and illustrious by their origin. How-

† Latin text in Henri Bordier, *Les Livres des Miracles* (de Saint. Grégoire). Paris, 1864. vol, 4, pp, 212—233; French translation (apparently the only one hitherto into a modern language) in the Introduction of the same author's French translation of *The History of the Franks*. Paris. 1859.

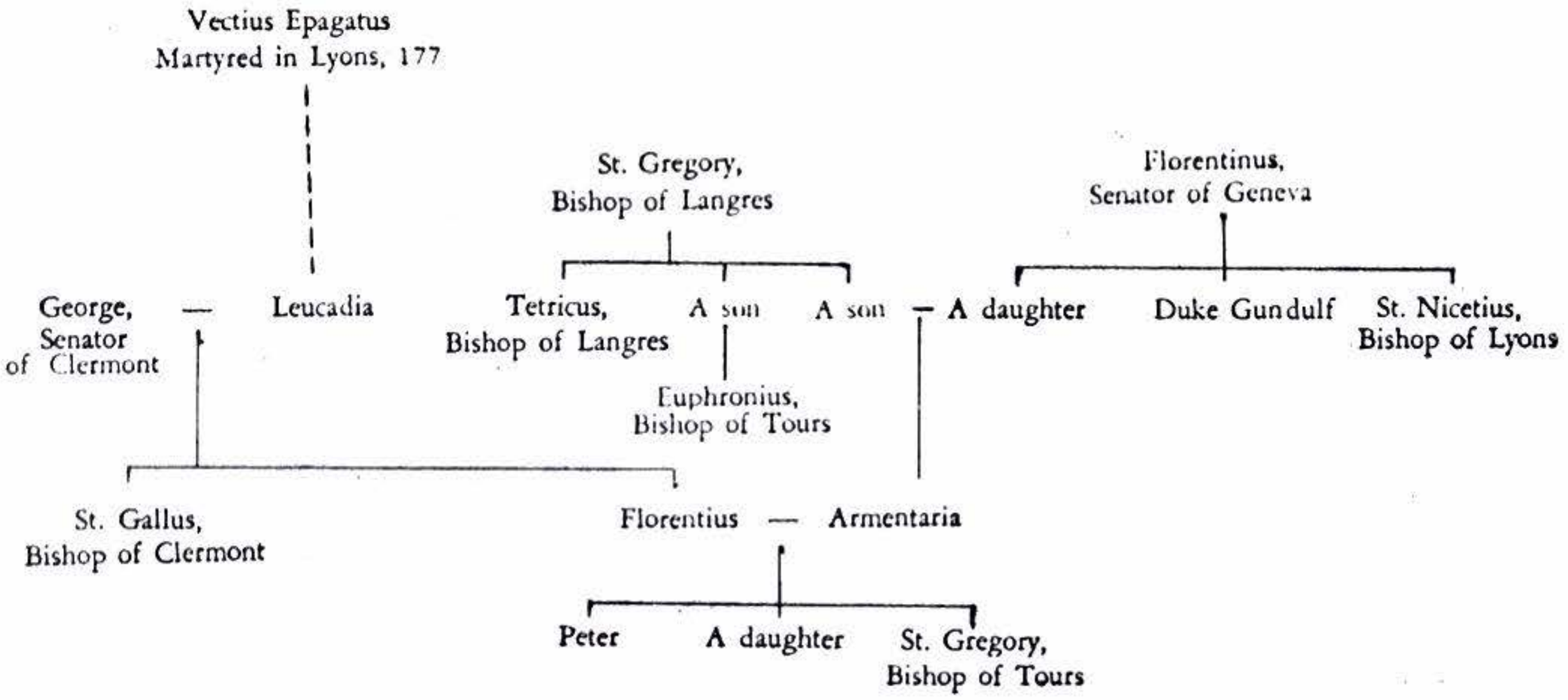
* I.e., who did not work miracles during their lifetime, as recorded in the Gospels.

ever, something more important, they showed themselves so attached by a remarkable devotion to the duties of service toward God, that every member of this family who might have been irreligious had the merit of being regarded as degenerate. We shall demonstrate this by saying something of those who were closest to him.

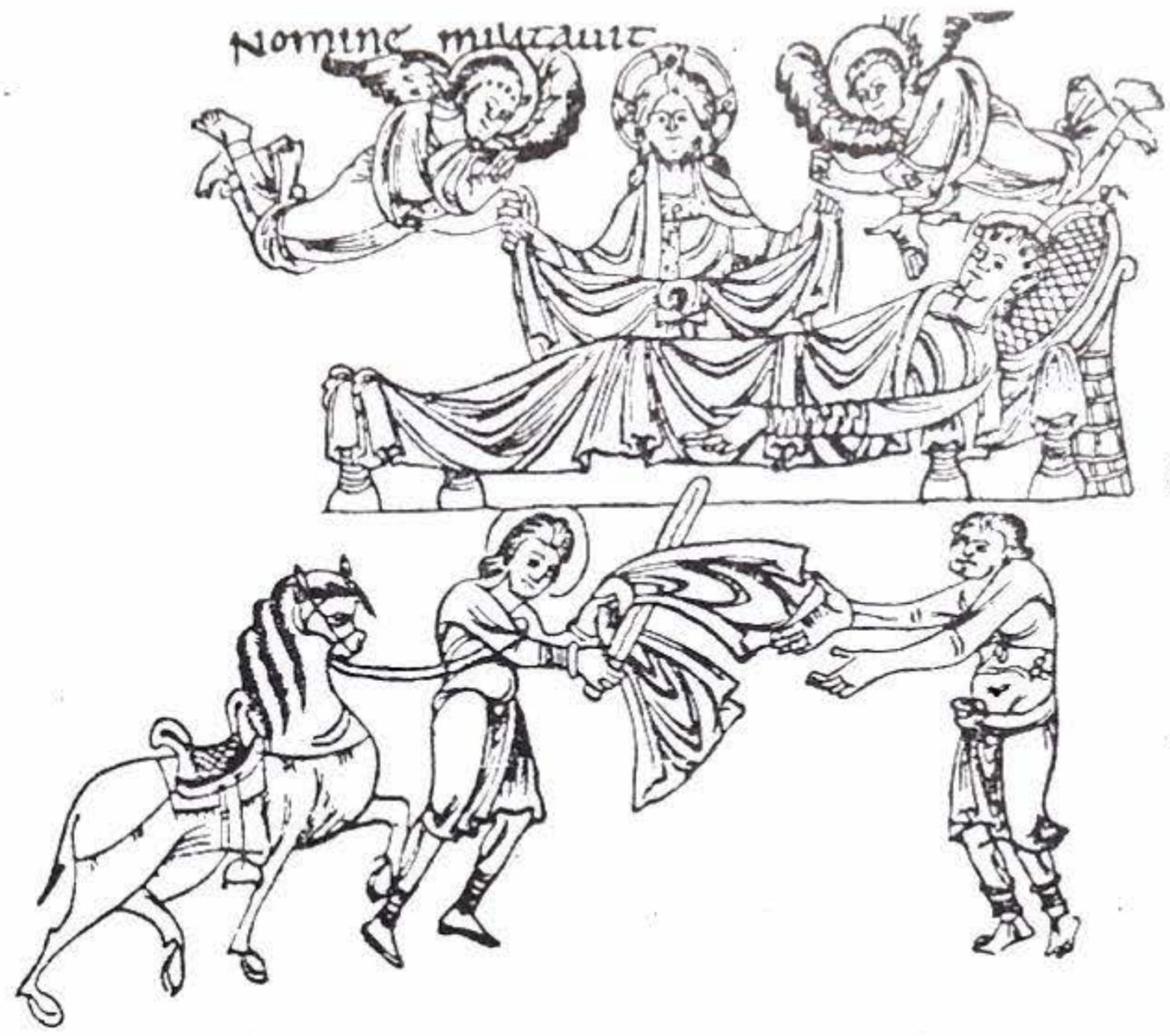
George, who in his lifetime was a senator, took for wife Leucadia; she was a descendent of the race of Vectius Epagatus who, according to the account of Eusebius in the fifth book of his History, suffered martyrdom and died at Lyons with other Christians of the same time, perhaps even more gloriously than they [A.D. 177]. This Leucadia brought into the world St. Gallus, Bishop of the see of Auvergne, and Florentius, who had the child of whom we are now speaking. Of this Florentius his father, of Armentaria his mother, of Peter his brother, of his sister the wife of Justin, and of his two nieces Heustenia and Justina the disciple of St. Radegunde, Gregory relates in his *Books of Miracles* things which reveal that their faith and their merits were not of negligible glory. Thus, of old Leucadia bore her head so high in this Auvergne, native land of the child, that she dominated among the senators like the statue of Rome.

It was from such persons that the lineage of St. Gregory came:** it furnished senators, judges, and everything that I could cite as being in the first rank of the most distinguished citizens. Let us say with assurance of his parents that, as the Lord is manifest in giving one the descent of which he is worthy, it is a fact which should serve for the praise of Gregory that he seemed to have

**** This lineage included many other illustrious names as well, including thirteen of the eighteen Bishops of Tours who preceded him. The genealogical chart below shows only his closest relatives:**



THE GENEALOGY OF ST. GREGORY



SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS, *spiritual model of St. Gregory, as a young soldier divides his cloak with a beggar, and at night sees in a dream that he has given it to Christ.* (11th c. Tours manuscript)

been naturally borne by his ancestry to the renown of sanctity. Fortunatus,* in speaking of the race and native land of Gregory, has said:

> "Honor of thy house, sublime head of the city of Tours, thou appearest among the Alps of the Auvergne as a mountain higher than they themselves."

And in addressing his mother:

> "Twice fortunate for her merits, both for herself and for the world, was that Maccabee who gave to heaven seven children worthy of the palms of martyrdom [II Macc., ch. 7]; and thou also, Armentaria, thou art truly a fortunate mother, thou who, brilliant in thy child, adorned with the works of thy son, receivest as a crown the steadfast sanctity of Gregory."

Thus, of a noble race an offspring yet more noble, like a rose that charms all the more when removed from its stem, he returns upon his parents the honor increased by a generous nature. And although it is not necessary to seek in names the majesty of the mysterious, still he, by a fortunate omen — as the event has demonstrated — received the name of Gregory.**It is thus that, in Greek, one calls the *vigilant* man; for he knew how to keep, not only the third

* Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus, the celebrated Christian poet of Gaul, c. 540-600. A close friend of St. Radegurde of Poitiers, he wrote her Life (in prose) as well as several other Lives (St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Germanus of Paris). St. Gregory encouraged his literary labors, and he wrote poems (quoted here) on the occasion of St. Gregory's accession as Bishop of Tours (573) and on his completion of the new basilica of St. Martin (590). He ended his days as Bishop of Poitiers.

** Actually, at baptism he was called Georgius Florentius; later, in honor of his great-grandfather, the Bishop of Langres (see *The Life of the Fathers*, ch. 7), he took the name of Gregorius at his tonsure.

vigil, but also the second, which is more difficult, and even the first, something one sees very rarely; and because he bore the yoke of the Saviour from his infancy, he sits solitary, following the expression of Jeremiah [Lamentations 1:1], or at least in the company of St. Martin. When he came to the age of a boy, he was consecrated to the study of letters, a labor where his tender intellect received its earliest development under Bishop Gallus, his uncle.

2. His Introduction to Miraculous Signs

HE WAS ALREADY being made to learn the letters of writing, when the Divine will introduced him to miraculous signs and ennobled his holy childhood by showing him wondrous things. His father, overtaken by a violent malady, had taken to his bed. Fever had begun to devour the marrow of his bones, the venom of gout to swell his body, a fiery hue to inflame his visage — when a man, appearing in sleep to the child, said to him: "Have you read the book of Joshua?" The child replied: "I know nothing but the letters of the alphabet, and I am grieved at studying them, to which I have been assigned against my will. I know nothing at all of the existence of this book." The man replied: "Go and take a small rod of fashioned wood to someone who can place this name there, and when it shall be written with ink, place it upon the bed of your father, by the side of his head. If you do this, he will be comforted."

When morning came, he informed his mother of what he had seen. The young child of pious spirit understood, in fact, that it was not he but his mother who should judge whether this thing should be done. His mother commanded that it should be done as in the vision. This is what he did, AND immediately recovered his health.* And what, in truth, is more reasonable than the fitness of the name of Jesus [Joshua] and of the wood on which it was written, in order to restore health?

3. His Granduncle, St. Nicetius of Lyons

HIS PARENTS, in their capacity of nobles, were possessors of a vast estate in Burgundy. As they were neighbors of St. Nicetius, a man of all sanctity who governed [as bishop] the city of Lyons, the latter had the young Gregory come to be near him. When he was brought into the bishop's presence, the holy man regarded him for some time, and having observed in this child I know

*** *The Glory of the Confessrs*, ch. 40. The "fashioned wood" in all likelihood was the form of the holy Cross, or a type of it.**

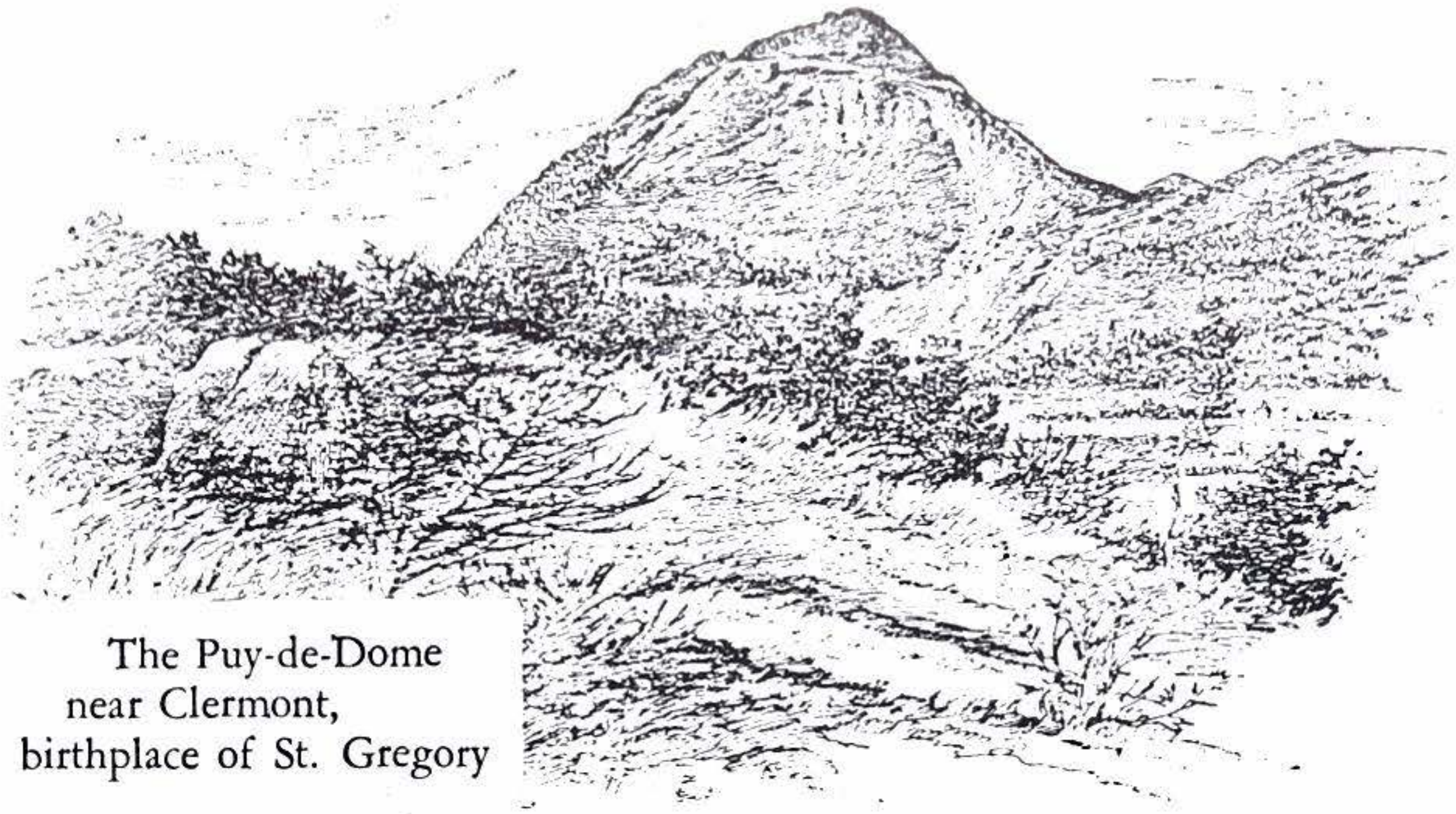
not what of the Divine, he asked that the child be lifted up to him — for he was lying down in his bed — and, like a dweller of paradise foreboding a future companion, he began to warm him by pressing him in his arms, but (a detail one should not pass over in silence) only while covering himself entirely with his tunic for fear of touching the child's naked skin, even if it might be with the tip of his fingers. This same child, when he became a man, would often relate to his listeners this trait of chastity and would counsel them to judge, by this precaution of a man who was perfect, how much we, as frail as we are, should avoid the contact of the flesh. Nicetius, therefore, blessed the child, and after having prayed for his happiness, he restored him to his own people.**

4. His Father is Healed a Second Time

ABOUT TWO YEARS after the miracle which we have related, Florentius was again overcome by a malady; a fever was kindled, the feet became swollen and were contorted with extreme pain. He was under the weight of his approaching end and lay already almost enclosed in the tomb. However, the child saw again in his sleep the same person who asked of him whether he knew the book of Tobit. "Not at all," he replied. The person continued: "Know that Tobit was blind, and that his son, accompanied by an angel, healed him with the liver of a fish. Do, therefore, the same, and your father will be saved." He reported these words to his mother, who immediately sent servants to the river. A fish was caught, and the part of the viscera which had been commanded was placed on burning coals. The fortunate conclusion of the miracle was not long in coming, for as soon as the first emanation of the odor had penetrated the nostrils of the father, the whole tumor and all the pain disappeared immediately.* If it is an admirable thing that the mouth of Zachariah was opened by the merit of John, it is no less a thing that Florentius was, not once but twice, healed by his son. This Florentius and his wife understood by this that their son would be a capable and blessedly inspired man; they could not but be aware, in fact, that the Divine wisdom had formed him for yet more delicate tasks. However, they did not have him tonsured immediately, desiring, I think, that he should consent himself to accept the clerical state; but he was assigned with yet greater care to literary studies.

** *The Life of the Fathers*, ch. 8, §2, where St. Gregory states that he was eight years old at this time.

* *The Glory of the Confessors*, ch. 40. See Tobit 6:1-8, where the angel explains that the smoke from the heart and liver of the fish is a remedy against evil spirits.

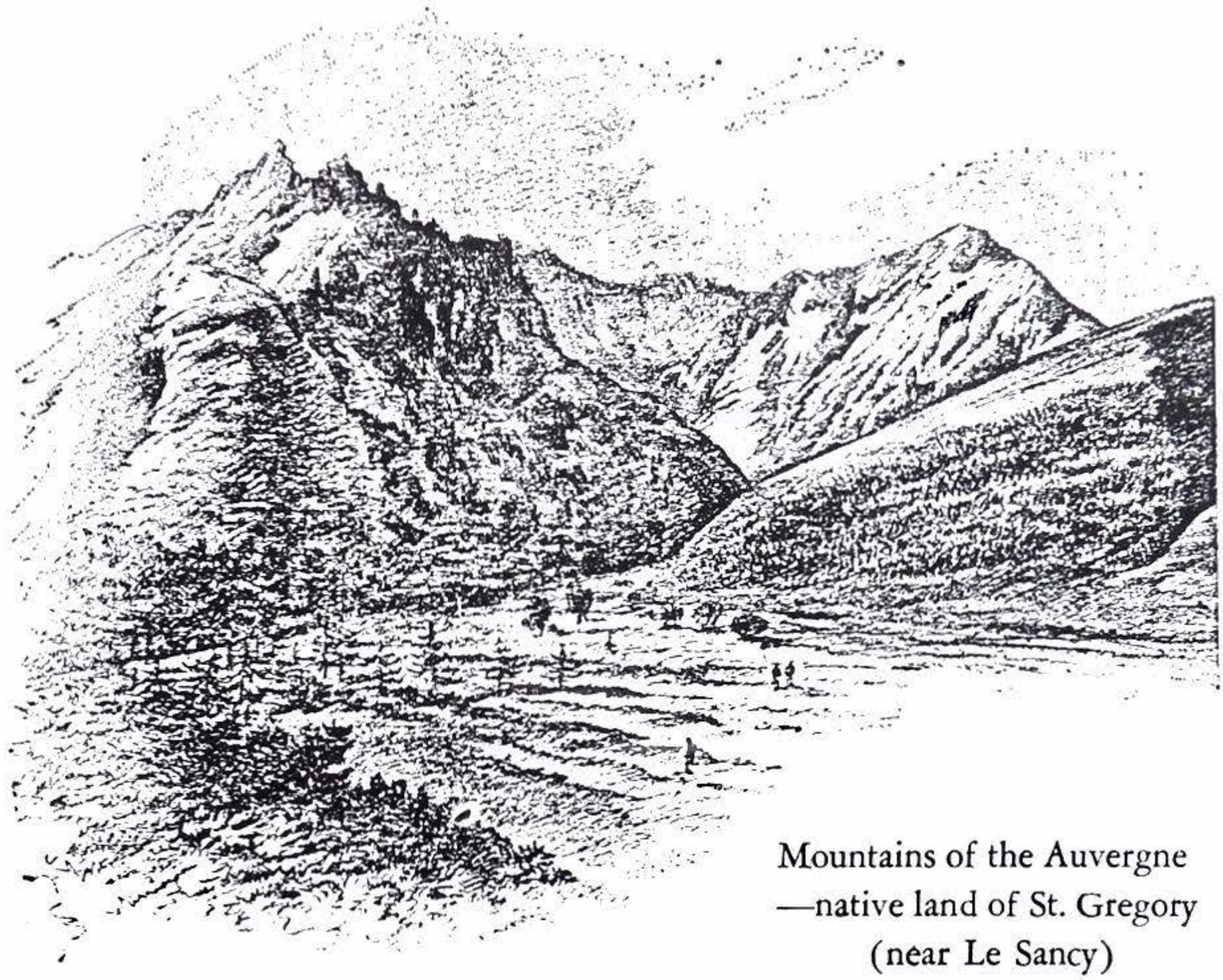


The Puy-de-Dome
near Clermont,
birthplace of St. Gregory

5. He is Healed, and Enters the Clerical State

HE WAS STILL but a layman and had increased in spirit and body when, being suddenly seized by a chest cold and a violent fever, he fell gravely ill; and then his weakness increased from day to day, being in no way improved by medical skill. His uncle Gallus visited him often, and his mother surrounded him, as mothers do, with continual groans. But at the moment when all hope in human help had already been given up, heaven inspired the young lad to have recourse to Divine assistance. He asked, therefore, that he be transported to the tomb of Saint Illidius (for it was nearby), but this did him little good, for he yet delayed to accomplish that to which this malady was meant to lead him. Having returned home, he began after a short time to be so tormented that he was regarded as hastening to his end. The suffering finally made him understand the matter; he consoled those weeping over him and told them: "Carry me once more to the tomb of St. Illidius; I have faith that he will promptly grant healing for me, and joy for you." Having thus been transported there, he prayed as mightily as he was able, promising, if he would be delivered from this ill, that he would take the clerical habit without any delay. As soon as he had said this, he felt his fever dissipate itself immediately; he emitted through the nostrils a quantity of blood, and his malady disappeared entirely, as a messenger hastens to depart after having obtained that for which he had come. The hair of his head, therefore, was cut, and he gave himself over entirely to religious duties.*

* *The Life of the Fathers*, ch. 2, §2.



Mountains of the Auvergne
—native land of St. Gregory
(near Le Sancy)

6. His Literary Studies

WHEN ST. GALLUS had been called to receive the just reward of a pious life, Avitus,† the man of God, received the lad. After having tested his character and his moral habits, he confided him to the care of masters, with whose help he made him climb the steps of wisdom as rapidly as their activity and the industry of their disciple permitted. You will find this in the Life of Illidius which has already been mentioned.* However, he exercised himself in the study of letters with such discernment that he kept himself from a double excess: he was not altogether horrified at the foolishness of the poets, and yet he was not devoted to them either, as many become in an unbefitting manner, and his soul was not a slave of their seductions. Doing what was required, he sharpened as upon flint the point of his spirit, and by this way, acting as if he had borrowed golden vessels from Egypt in order to go and eat manna in the desert, he penetrated to the examination of the power which the Divine

† Then (551) Archdeacon in Clermont, later Bishop of Clermont; 517-594.

* *The Life of the Fathers*, ch. 2, Preface, where St. Gregory says that it was from Bishop Avitus that he acquired his basic knowledge of Christian doctrine and learned how to honor the saints of God.

Scriptures conceal. This is what he demonstrates when he says, speaking of himself: "I do not speak of the flight of Saturn, the wrath of Juno, the adulteries of Jupiter"; and, continuing his discourse, he cites other fabulous persons, until he says: "Despising all that as destined soon to perish, I return rather to Divine things and to the Gospel, for I have no wish to be caught and enveloped in my own nets." He demonstrates in this passage** that he knew many things, but that his enlightened judgment rejected them.

7. He Grows in Sanctity by the Examples of the Saints

AT THE ESTABLISHED TIME† he was ordained deacon. There was then a man from the land of Auvergne who had carried away some wood from the all-holy sepulchre of the blessed Martin; but when this man carelessly failed to pay the respect due to this wood, his whole family fell gravely ill. Soon the ill grew worse; and being in ignorance as to what might be the cause of this, he did not correct himself until he saw in a dream a terrible figure who asked him why he was acting thus in his regard. The man said that he did not know what was being spoken of. "This wood which you have taken from the couch of lord Martin," was the reply, "you are keeping without care; this is why you have incurred these evils. But go now and bring it to the Deacon Gregory."†† The latter, I am persuaded, was already a worthy priest, since the lord Martin entrusted to him the most precious thing that his flock possessed.

There were in Auvergne at this time many persons who shone forth in the ecclesiastical calling and whom this young man visited, whether when he was with the blessed Avitus or when alone,* so that now he would take from them examples of piety, and now, by a return of mutual love, he would offer them that which they might lack themselves. He revered Christ in them, and, since Christ cannot be beheld in His Own Person, he saw Him in them as one sees a ray of the sun shining brightly on the mountain peaks. Directing his efforts towards this aim, therefore, he sought to accomplish, whether by their example or by the example of those who had already preceded them to heaven, all that could serve for the glory of Christ.

To be continued.

** *The Glory of the Martyrs*, Preface.

† At the canonical age of 25, that is, in about the year 563.

†† *The Miracles of Blessed Martin*, Book I, ch. 35.

* For example, the recluse Caluppan, whom he visited with Bishop Avitus. See *The Life of the Fathers*, 11, §3.

A SIGN FOR TODAY

THROUGHOUT CHRISTIAN HISTORY the Most Holy Mother of God has taken part in the earthly life of men. To certain chosen ones She has appeared; She is the Abbess of all monastics; She pours out miracles through Her innumerable wonderworking Icons; and often before great calamities She gives signs to warn men and bring them back to the thought of God and eternal life.

One of the great wonderworking Icons of the Mother of God, the chief holy object of the Holy Mountain of Athos, is the Iviron Icon, the "Keeper of the Portal," located in the Georgian ("Iberian") monastery. According to the prophecies of St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher, the 17th-century Athonite, before the end of the world this Icon will leave the Holy Mountain, which will then be devastated. Just before the departure of the Icon, the monastery will be shaken; "senseless earth will sense that it is about to be impoverished of its guardian."

In our frightful times evil increases its dominance of mankind with a rapid tempo. A whole series of awesome calamities have already come or seem to be upon us. In the face of this, Orthodox Christians, called by their very name to be defenders of the only true Christianity, are abandoning their calling and joining those who have lost the truth and the savor of Orthodoxy. True Christianity itself seems on the verge of disappearing from the face of the earth, of becoming invisible to apostate humanity.

The Holy Mountain of Athos, for a millenium a bastion of Orthodoxy, is in great danger: outwardly from the new infiltration of Soviet church agents and the curse of tourism, and inwardly from a widespread lack of firmness and prudent zeal in defending the truth. Just recently a new sign has appeared, as reported in a letter from a monk of the Holy Mountain (January 17|30, 1976): "For days now the lampada before the Icon of the Iviron Mother of God has been swaying. She is giving us a sign of a coming event or She is displeased at what is to take place on the Holy Mountain."

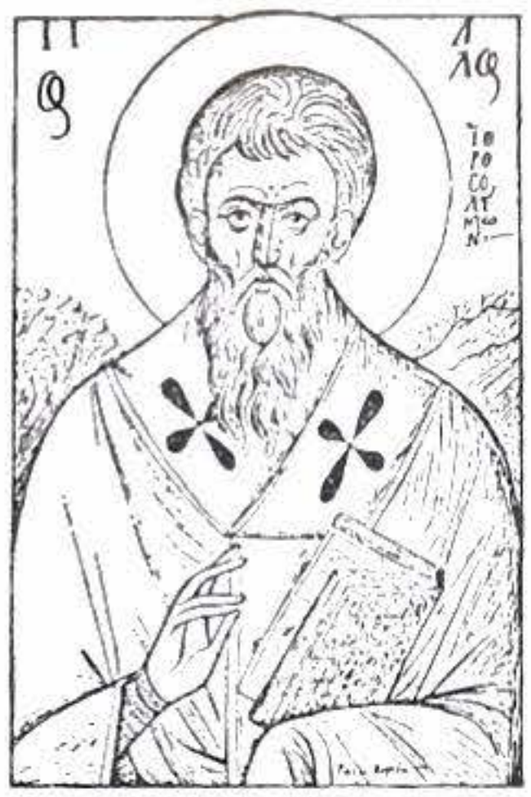
Through the prayers of the Mother of God, may God have mercy on us. Most Holy Mother of God, save us!

THE IBERIAN (IVIRON) ICON

Copy in Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass.

Commemorated on March 31 and February 12

St. Dionysius the Areopagite



St. Cyril of Jerusalem

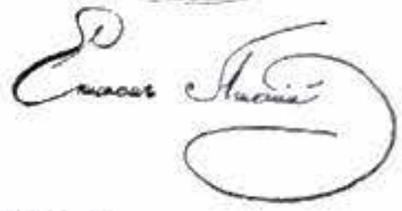
The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

III. HOW *NOT* TO READ THE HOLY FATHERS

ENOUGH HAS BEEN SAID to indicate the seriousness and sobriety with which one must approach the study of the Holy Fathers. But the very habit of light-mindedness in 20th-century man, of not taking seriously even the most solemn subjects, of "playing with ideas" — which is what scholars at universities now do — makes it necessary for us to look more closely at some common mistakes which have been made by nominal Orthodox Christians in their study or teaching of the Holy Fathers. It will be necessary here to cite names and publications in order to know precisely the pitfalls into which many have already fallen. This examination will enable us to see more clearly how *not* to approach the Holy Fathers.

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov



THE FIRST PITFALL: DILETTANTISM

This, the pit into which the most light-minded of those interested in Orthodox theology or spirituality usually fall, is most apparent in "ecumenical" gatherings of many kinds — conferences, "retreats," and the like. Such gatherings are a specialty of the English Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, as reflected in its journal, *Sobornost*. Here we may read, for example, in an address on the Desert Fathers by a supposedly Orthodox clergyman, "The Fathers of the Desert can play an extremely important role for us. They can be for all of us a wonderful place of ecumenical meeting."* Can the speaker be so naive as not to know that the Father he wishes to study,like all the Holy Fathers, would be horrified to learn that his words were being used to teach the art of prayer to the heterodox? It is one of the rules of politeness at such "ecumenical" gatherings that the heterodox are not informed that the first pre-requisite for studying the Fathers is to have the same faith as the Fathers — Orthodoxy. Without this pre-requisite all instruction in prayer and spiritual doctrine is only a deception, a means for further entangling the heterodox listener in his own errors. This is not fair to the listener; it it is not serious on the part of the speaker; it is exactly how *not* to undertake the study or the teaching of the Holy Fathers.

In the same periodical one may read of a "pilgrimage to Britain" wherein a group of Protestants attended services of various sects and then an Orthodox Liturgy, at which "the Father made a very clear and illuminating address

*** Archimandrite Demetrius Trakatellis, "St. Neilus on Prayer," *Sobornost*, 1966, Winter-Spring, page 84.**

on the topic of the Eucharist" (*Sobornost,* Summer, 1969, p. 680). Undoubtedly the Father quoted the Holy Fathers in his address—but he did not bring understanding to his listeners; he only confused them the more by allowing them now to think that Orthodoxy is just another of the sects they were visiting, and that the Orthodox doctrine of the Eucharist can help them the better to understand their Lutheran or Anglican services. In an account of an "Ecumenical Retreat" in the same issue (p. 684), we find a result of the preaching of "Orthodox theology" under such conditions. After attending an Orthodox Liturgy, the retreatants attended a "Baptist Communion service," which was "a breath of fresh air." "Particularly refreshing was the little sermon on the note of Resurrection joy. Those of us who know the Orthodox Church have found the same truth expressed there and we were happy to find it in a Baptist service also." The Orthodox encouragers of such insensitive dilettantism have doubtless forgotten the Scriptural injunction: *Cast not your pearls before swine.*

Of late the same Fellowship has broadened its dilettantism, following the latest intellectual fashion, to include lectures on Sufism and other non-Christian religious traditions, which probably enrich the "spirituality" of the listeners in much the way Orthodoxy has been doing it for them up to now.

The same corrupt spiritual attitude may be seen on a more sophisticated level in the "agreed statements" that issue now and again from "consultations of theologians," whether Orthodox-Roman Catholic, Orthodox-Anglican, or the like. These "agreed statements," on such subjects as "the Eucharist" or "the nature of the Church" are, again, an exercise in "ecumenical" politeness which does not even hint to the heterodox (if the "Orthodox theologians" present even know it) that, whatever *definition* of such realities might be "agreed upon," the heterodox, being without the experience of living in the Church of Christ, lack the *reality* thereof. Such "theologians" do not hesitate even to seek some "agreement" on spirituality itself — where, if anywhere, the impossibility of any agreement should be glaringly evident. Those who can believe, as the official "Message" of the "Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium" (Oxford, 1973) declares, that Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican monastics have a "deep unity between us, as members of monastic communities coming from different Church traditions," surely are thinking according to the corrupt wisdom of this world and its "ecumenical" fashions, and *not* in accordance with the Orthodox monastic-spiritual tradition, which is strict in its insistence on purity of faith. The worldly purpose and tone of such "dialogues" is made quite clear in a report on the same Symposium, which indicates that this "dia-

logue" is now going to be broadened to include non-Christian monasticism — something which will enable "our common Christian monasticism... to identify in some real way with the monasticism of Buddhism and Hinduism."* However sophisticated the participants in this Symposium may imagine themselves to be, their dilettantism is by no means superior to that of the Protestant laymen who are awed just as much by the Baptist communion service as by the Orthodox Liturgy.

Again, one may read, in an "Orthodox" periodical, an account of an "Ecumenical Institute on Spirituality" (Catholic-Protestant-Orthodox) held at St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York in 1969, where a talk was given by the "broad-minded" Orthodox professor Nicholas Arseniev on Christian spirituality East and West. An Orthodox priest thus reports his talk: "One of the professor's most striking assertions was that there already exists a Christian unity in the saints of all Christian traditions. It would be interesting to try to work out the implications of this for a treatment of the doctrinal and institutional divisions which also clearly exist."** The doctrinal deviations of "Orthodox" ecumenists are bad enough, but when it comes to spirituality there seem to be no bounds whatever to what may be said or believed — an indication of how remote and vague the tradition and experience of genuine Orthodox spirituality have become to the "Orthodox theologians" of today. A true and serious study of "comparative spirituality" could indeed be made, but it will never produce an "agreed statement." To take only one example: the prime example of "Western spirituality" cited by Dr. Arseniev and nearly everyone else is Francis of Assisi, who according to the standard of Orthodox spirituality is a classic example of a monk who went spiritually astray and fell into deception (prelest) and was revered as a saint only because the West had already fallen into apostasy and lost the Orthodox standard of spiritual life. In our study of the Orthodox spiritual tradition in this book it will be necessary to point out (by way of contrast) precisely where Francis and later Western "saints" went astray; for the present, it is enough to indicate that the attitude which produces such "ecumenical institutes" and "agreed statements" is basically the same attitude of frivolous dilettantism which we have already examined on a more popular level above.

The main cause of this spiritually pathological attitude is probably not so much the wrong intellectual attitude of theological relativism which prevails

* *Diakonia*, 1974, no. 4, pages 380, 392.

** Fr. Thomas Hopko, in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 1969, no. 4, p. 225.

in "ecumenical" circles, as it is something deeper, something involved in the whole personality and way of life of most "Christians" today. One may see a glimpse of this in the comment of one Orthodox student at the "Ecumenical Institute," sponsored by the World Council of Churches at Bossey, Switzerland. Speaking of the value of "the personal encounter with so many different approaches which we had not previously experienced," he notes that "the best discussions" (which were on the subject of "Evangelism") "took place not during the plenary sessions, but rather when sitting by the fireplace drinking a glass of wine."* This almost off-hand remark reveals more than the "casualness" of contemporary life; it indicates a whole modern attitude toward the Church and her theology and practice. But this brings us to the second basic pitfall we must avoid in our study of the Holy Fathers.

THE SECOND PITFALL: "THEOLOGY WITH A CIGARETTE"

It is not only "ecumenical" gatherings which can be light-minded and frivolous; one may note precisely the same tone at "Orthodox" conventions and "retreats," and at gatherings of "Orthodox theologians." The Holy Fathers are not always directly involved or discussed in such gatherings, but an awareness of the spirit of such gatherings will prepare us to understand the background which seemingly serious Orthodox Christians bring with them when they begin to study spirituality and theology.

One of the largest "Orthodox" organizations in the United States is the "Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs," consisting chiefly of members of the former Russian-American Metropolia, which has a yearly convention whose activities are quite typical of "Orthodoxy" in America. The October, 1973, issue of *The Russian Orthodox Journal* is devoted to the Convention of 1973, at which Bishop Dimitry of Hartford told the delegates: "What I see here, and I mean this extremely sincerely, is that the FROC is potentially the greatest spiritual force in all of American Orthodoxy" (p. 18). It is true that a number of clergymen attend the Convention, usually including Metropolitan Ireney, that there are daily religious services, and that there is always a seminar on a religious subject. Significantly, during this year's seminar (entitled, in the "American Orthodox" spirit, 'What? Lent Again?'), "questions arose about observing Saturday evening as a preparation period for Sunday. Conflicts arise because American life styles have made Saturday night the 'social night' of the week." One priest who was present gave an Orthodox answer to this question:

* ***St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 1969, no. 3, p. 164.**

"On Saturday evening he advocates attendance at Vespers, confession, and a quiet evening" (p. 28). But for the Convention planners there was quite obviously no "conflict" whatever: they provided (as at every Convention) a Saturday-night dance fully in the "American life-style," and on other nights similar amusements, including a "Teen-age Frolic" with a "Rock and Roll band," an imitation gambling casino "with an environment reminiscent of Las Vegas," and some instruction for men in "the 'cultural' art of belly dancing" (p. 24). The pictures accompanying the articles show some of these frivolities, which indeed assure us that "Orthodox" Americans are by no means behind their fellow-countrymen in their pursuit of shamelessly inane entertainments — interspersed with solemn photographs of the Divine Liturgy. This mixture of the sacred and the frivolous is considered "normal" in "American Orthodoxy" today; this organization is (let us repeat the bishop's words) "potentially the greatest spiritual force in all of American Orthodoxy." But what spiritual preparation can a person bring to the Divine Liturgy when he has spent the previous evening celebrating the spirit of this world, and has spent many hours during the week-end at totally frivolous entertainments? A sober observer can only reply: Such a person brings the worldly spirit with him, worldliness is the very air he breathes; and therefore for him Orthodoxy itself enters into the "casual" American "life-style." If such a person were to begin reading the Holy Fathers, which speak of a totally different way of life, he would either find them totally irrelevant to his own way of life, or else would be required to distort their teaching in order to make it applicable to his way of life.

Let us look now at a more serious "Orthodox" gathering, where the Holy Fathers are indeed mentioned: the yearly "Conferences" of the "Orthodox Campus Commission." The Fall, 1975, issue of *Concern* magazine gives a number of photographs of the 1975 Conference, whose aim was entirely "spiritual": the same "casual" spirit, with young ladies in shorts (which puts even the FROC Convention to shame!), and the priest delivering a "main address" with his hand in his pocket... and in such an atmosphere Orthodox Christians discuss such subjects as "The Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church." The same issue of *Concern* gives us an insight into what goes on in the *minds* of such outwardly "casual" people. A new "women's liberation" column (with a title so deliberately vulgar that we need not repeat it here) is edited by a smart young convert: "When I converted to Orthodoxy, I felt that I was aware of most of the problems that I would meet in the Church. I knew of the scandalous ethnicism that divides the Church, of the quarrels and factions that

plague parishes, and of the religious ignorance..." This columnist then proceeds to advocate the "reform" of the traditional forty-day period for "churching" a woman after childbirth, as well as other "old-world" attitudes which this "enlightened" modern American finds "unfair." Perhaps she has never met a genuine Orthodox clergyman or layman who could explain to her the meaning or convey to her the tone of the authentic Orthodox way of life; perhaps if she did encounter such a one, she might not even wish to understand him, nor to comprehend that the worst of a convert's "problems" today are not in the easily-criticized Orthodox environment at all, but rather in *the mind and attitude of the converts themselves*. The way of life reflected in *Concern* is not the Orthodox way of life, and its very tone makes any approach to the Orthodox way of life almost impossible. Such periodicals and conferences reflect the majority of pampered, self-centered, frivolous young people of today who, when they come to religion, expect to find "spirituality with comfort," something which is instantly reasonable to their immature minds which have been stupefied by their "modern education." The young — and many older — clergymen of today, themselves having been exposed to the worldly atmosphere in which young people are growing up, sometimes stoop to flattering the young people's easy criticism of their elders and their Orthodox "ghettos," and at best give powerless academic lectures on subjects far over their heads. Of what benefit is it to speak to such young people on "Deification" or "The Way of the Saints" (*Concern*, Fall, 1974) — concepts which, to be sure, are intellectually comprehensible to college students today, but for which they are emotionally and spiritually totally unprepared, not knowing the ABC's of what it means to struggle in the Orthodox life and separate oneself from one's own worldly background and upbringing? Without such preparation and training in the ABC's of spiritual life, and an awareness of the difference between worldliness and the Orthodox way of life, such lectures can have no fruitful spiritual result.

Seeing this background from which today's young Orthodox Christians are emerging in America (and throughout the free world), one is not surprised to discover the general lack of seriousness in most works — lectures, articles, books — on Orthodox theology and spirituality today; and the message of even the best lecturers and writers in the "mainstream" of the Orthodox jurisdictions today seems strangely powerless, without spiritual force. On a more popular level also, the life of the ordinary Orthodox parish today gives an impression of spiritual inertia quite similar to that of today's "Orthodox theologians." Why is this?

THE HOLY FATHERS OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

The powerlessness of Orthodoxy as it is so widely expressed and lived today is doubtless itself a product of the poverty, the lack of seriousness, of contemporary life. Orthodoxy today, with its priests and theologians and faithful, has become *worldly*. The young people who come from comfortable homes and either accept or seek (the "native Orthodox" and "converts" being alike in this regard) a religion that is not remote from the self-satisfied life they have known; the professors and lecturers whose milieu is the academic world where, notoriously, nothing is accepted as ultimately serious, a matter of life or death; the very academic atmosphere of self-satisfied worldliness in which almost all "retreats" and "conferences" and "institutes" take place — all of these factors join together to produce an artificial, hothouse atmosphere in which, no matter what might be said concerning exalted Orthodox truths or experiences, by the very context in which it is said and by virtue of the worldly orientation of both speaker and listener, it *cannot* strike to the depths of the soul and produce the profound commitment which used to be normal to Orthodox Christians. By contrast to this hothouse atmosphere, the *natural* Orthodox education, the natural *transmission of Orthodoxy itself,* occurs in what used to be accepted as the natural Orthodox environment: the monastery, where not only novices but also pious laymen come to be instructed as much by the atmosphere of a holy place as by the conversation of a particularly revered elder; the normal parish, if its priest is of the "old-fashioned" mentality, on fire with Orthodoxy and so desirous for the salvation of his flock that he will not excuse their sins and worldly habits but is always urging them to a higher spiritual life; even the theological school, if it is of the old type and not modelled on the secular universities of the West, where there is opportunity to make living contact with true Orthodox scholars who actually live their faith and think according to the "old school" of faith and piety. But all of this — what used to be regarded as the normal Orthodox environment — is now disdained by Orthodox Christians who are in harmony with the artificial environment of the modern world, and is no longer even part of the experience of the new generation. In the Russian emigration, the "theologians" of the new school, who are eager to be in harmony with intellectual fashion, to quote the latest Roman Catholic or Protestant scholarship, to adopt the whole "casual" tone of contemporary life and especially of the academic world — have been aptly called "theologians with a cigarette." With equal justification one might call them "theologians over a wine glass," or advocates of "theology on a full stomach" or "spirituality with comfort." Their message has no power, because they

themselves are entirely of this world and address worldly people in a worldly atmosphere — from all this it is not Orthodox exploits that come, but only idle talk and empty, pompous phrases.

An accurate reflection of this spirit on a popular level may be seen in a brief article written by a prominent layman of the Greek Archdiocese in America and published in the official newspaper of this jurisdiction. Obviously influenced by the "patristic revival" which hit the Greek Archdiocese and its seminary some years ago, this layman writes: "The phrase 'to be still' is a much needed one today. It is actually an important part of our Orthodox tradition, but the fast world in which we live seems to crowd it out of our schedule." To find this silence he advocates "making a beginning, even in our homes... At the table before eating, instead of a rote prayer why not a minute of silent prayer, and then jointly reciting the 'Our Father'? We could also experiment with this in our parishes during the services. Nothing need be added or detracted. At the end of the service merely forego any audible prayer, chanting, singing or movement, and just stand in silence, each of us praying for God's presence in our lives. Silence and body discipline are very much part of our Orthodox tradition. In centuries past it was called in the Eastern Church, the 'hesychast movement'... To be still. That is a beginning toward the inner renewal we all need, and should be seeking." (*The Orthodox Observer*, Sept. 17, 1975, p. 7.)

The author obviously means well, but like the Orthodox churches themselves today he is caught in a trap of worldly thinking which makes it impossible for him to see things *in the normal Orthodox way.* Needless to say, if one is going to read the Holy Fathers and undergo a "Patristic revival" only in order to fit into one's schedule now and then a moment of purely outward silence (which is obviously filled *inwardly* with the worldly tone of one's whole life outside of that moment!) and to inflate it with the exalted name of hesychasm — then it is better not to read the Holy Fathers at all, for this reading will simply lead us to become hypocrites and fakers, no more able than the Orthodox youth organizations to separate the sacred and the frivolous. In order to approach the Holy Fathers one must be striving to get *out* of this worldly atmosphere, after recognizing it for what it is. A person who is at home in the atmosphere of today's Orthodox "retreats," "conferences," and "institutes" cannot be at home in the world of genuine Orthodox spirituality, which has a totally different "tone" from that which is present in these typical expressions of "religious" worldliness. We must face squarely a painful but necessary truth: a person who is *seriously* reading the Holy Fathers and who is struggling according to his strength (even if on a very primitive level) to lead an Orthodox

spiritual life — *must* be out of step with the times, *must* be a stranger to the atmosphere of contemporary "religious" movements and discussions, *must* be consciously striving to lead a life quite different from that reflected in almost all "Orthodox" books and periodicals today. All this, to be sure, is easier said than done; but there are some helps of a general nature which can aid us in this struggle. To these we shall return after a brief examination of yet one more pitfall to avoid in our study of the Holy Fathers.

THE THIRD PITFALL: "ZEAL NOT ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGE" (Rom. 10:2)

Given the powerlessness and insipidity of worldly "Orthodoxy" today, it is not surprising that some, even in the midst of worldly "Orthodox" organizations, should catch a glimpse of the fire of true Orthodoxy which is contained in the Divine services and in the Patristic writings, and, holding it as a standard against those who are satisfied with a worldly religion, should become zealots of true Orthodox life and faith. In itself, this is praiseworthy; but in actual practice it is not so easy to escape the nets of worldliness, and all too often such zealots not only show many signs of the worldliness they desire to escape, but also are led outside the realm of Orthodox tradition altogether into something more like a feverish sectarianism.

The most striking example of such "zeal not according to knowledge" is to be seen in the present-day "charismatic" movement. There is no need here to describe this movement.* Each issue of the "Orthodox charismatic" magazine, *The Logos,* makes it ever clearer that those among Orthodox Christians who have been drawn into this movement have no solid background in the *experience* of Patristic Christianity, and their apologies are almost entirely Protestant in language and tone. *The Logos*, to be sure, has quoted writings of St. Simeon the New Theologian and St. Seraphim of Sarov on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit; but the contrast between these true Orthodox teachings on the Holy Spirit and the Protestant experiences described in the same magazine is so glaring that it is obvious that there are two entirely different realities involved: one, the Holy Spirit, Who comes only to those struggling in the true Orthodox life, but not (in these latter times) in any spectacular way; and quite another, the ecumenist religious "spirit of the times," which takes possession precisely of those who give up (or never knew) the "exclusive" Orthodox way of life

*** A detailed description may be read in *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1975.**

and "open" themselves to a new revelation accessible to all no matter of what sect. One who is carefully studying the Holy Fathers and applying their teaching to his own life will be able to detect in such a movement the tell-tale signs of spiritual deception (prelest), and also will recognize the quite un-Orthodox practices and tone which characterize it.

There is also a quite unspectacular form of "zeal not according to knowledge" which can be more of a danger to the ordinary serious Orthodox Christian, because it can lead him astray in his personal spiritual life without being revealed by any of the more obvious signs of spiritual deception. This is a danger especially for new converts, for novices in monasteries—and, in a word, for everyone whose zealotry is young, largely untested by experience, and untempered by prudence.

This kind of zeal is the product of the joining together of two basic attitudes. First, there is the high idealism which is inspired especially by accounts of desert-dwelling, severe ascetic exploits, exalted spiritual states. This idealism in itself is good, and it is characteristic of all true zealotry for spiritual life; but in order to be fruitful it must be tempered by actual experience of the difficulties of spiritual struggle, and by the humility born of this struggle if it is genuine. Without this tempering it will lose contact with the reality of spiritual life and be made fruitless by following—to cite again the words of Bishop Ignatius — "an impossible dream of a perfect life pictured vividly and alluringly in his imagination." To make this idealism fruitful one must find out how to follow the counsel of Bishop Ignatius: "Do not trust your thoughts, opinions, dreams, impulses or inclinations, even though they offer you or put before you in an attractive guise the most holy monastic life" (*The Arena*, ch. 10).

Second, there is joined to this deceptive idealism, especially in our rationalistic age, an extremely *critical* attitude applied to whatever does not measure up to the novice's impossibly high standard. This is the chief cause of the disillusionment which often strikes converts and novices after their first burst of enthusiasm for Orthodoxy or monastic life has faded away. This disillusionment is a sure sign that their approach to spiritual life and to the reading of the Holy Fathers has been one-sided, with an over-emphasis on abstract knowledge that puffs one up, and a lack of emphasis or total unawareness of the *pain of heart* which must accompany spiritual struggle. This is the case with the novice who discovers that the rule of fasting in the monastery he has chosen does not measure up to that which he has read about among the desert Fathers, or that the Typicon of Divine services is not followed to the letter, or

that his spiritual father has human failings like anyone else and is not actually a "God-bearing Elder"; but this same novice is the very first one who would collapse in a short while under a rule of fasting or a Typicon unsuited to our spiritually feeble days, and who finds it impossible to offer the trust to his spiritual father without which he cannot be spiritually guided at all. People living in the world can find exact parallels to this monastic situation in new converts in Orthodox parishes today.

The Patristic teaching on *pain of heart* is one of the most important teachings for our days when "head-knowledge" is so much over-emphasized at the expense of the proper development of emotional and spiritual life. This will be discussed in the appropriate chapters of this Patrology. The lack of this essential experience is what above all is responsible for the dilettantism, the triviality, the want of seriousness in the ordinary study of the Holy Fathers today; without it, one cannot apply the teachings of the Holy Fathers to one's own life. One may attain to the very highest level of understanding with the mind the teaching of the Holy Fathers, may have "at one's fingertips" quotes from the Holy Fathers on every conceivable subject, may have "spiritual experiences" which *seem* to be those described in the Patristic books, may even know perfectly all the pitfalls into which it is possible to fall in spiritual life — and still, without pain of heart, one can be a barren fig tree, a boring "know-it-all" who is always "correct," or an adept in all the present-day "charismatic" experiences, who does not know and cannot convey the true spirit of the Holy Fathers.

All that has been said above is by no means a complete catalogue of the ways *not* to read or approach the Holy Fathers. It is only a series of hints as to the many ways in which it is possible to approach the Holy Fathers wrongly, and therefore derive no benefit or even be harmed from reading them. It is an attempt to warn the Orthodox Christian that the study of the Holy Fathers is a serious matter which should not be undertaken lightly, according to any of the intellectual fashions of our times. But this warning should not frighten away the serious Orthodox Christian. The reading of the Holy Fathers is, indeed, an indispensable thing for one who values his salvation and wishes to work it out with fear and trembling; but one must come to this reading in a *practical* way so as to make maximum use of it.

Next: Introduction, IV: How to Make Profitable Use of the Patristic Writings.

The Life and Ascetic Labors of Our Father, Elder Paisius, Archimandrite of the Holy Moldavian Monasteries of Niamets and Sekoul. Part Sixteen

THE LETTERS OF ELDER PAISIUS FROM NIAMETS

3. To Maria Petrovna Protasieva*

M. P. Protasieva, Superior of the Alexeevsky Community in Arzamas in central Russia, after the death of her spiritual father, the great Elder Theodore (Ushakov) of Sanaxar, in 1791, *appealed for spiritual instruction to Elder Paisius, whom she knew to be teaching the same Patristic doctrine of monasticism as her own Elder. Elder Paisius' reply to her is one of the classic expressions of true monastic life, founded on holy obedience. The main points of her biography, relating to her monastic path, are given in this letter.*

To the Honorable Lady Maria, with her God-gathered Sisters,
REJOICE IN THE LORD!

Christ our true God says: *I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Luke 12:49.) This Divine fire, cast on the earth of their hearts, the holy Apostles and disciples of the Lord received from Him, and being kindled with a flame of love for Him,they left the world and all that is in the world and, coming to Him as to their Lord and Teacher and true Instructor on the path of salvation, gave themselves over soul and body into true obedience and cutting off of their own will and understanding to

*** Translated from the complete Slavonic text in the Optina edition of Elder Paisius' Life, pp. 239-247; partial Russian translation in Chetverikov, II, pp. 46-50.**

BLESSED SCHEMA-ABBESS MARTHA
Born Maria Petrovna Protasieva
†April 30, 1813

Portrait based on her likeness while alive,
but presented here with a scroll as a
preparation for her possible canonization

ARCHIMANDRITE MACARIUS OF PESNOSHA MONASTERY
†1811, May 31

A disciple of the same Elder Theodore of Sanaxar, after whose death he became the disciple of Elder Cleophas, Athonite disciple of Blessed Paisius, and was in correspondence with Elder Paisius, inheriting from him his staff, shown here in his only portrait.

their last breath, and with great and unutterable joy said to Him: *Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee* (Matt. 19:27). Having ever this Divine fire in their hearts, and in everything following the Divine will of their Lord and Teacher, they preserved this obedience as the apple of their eye to the end of their life, sealing it with the bearing of numberless temptations and various deaths and the spilling of their blood to the last drop, which they shed for their faith and love toward Christ God so that they might preserve their obedience to Him, as a pure and immaculate sacrifice, unto death.

The holy Martyrs received this Divine fire of God's love and endured with unutterable joy various torments and the cruelest deaths for Christ God, receiving from Him the crown of His Divine glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. All our holy and God-bearing Fathers received this Divine fire and fled the world and all that is in the world; some of them remained in the common life in perfect obedience and cutting off of their own will to their last breath, and received a martyr's crown from the Lord's right hand; and some of them struggled in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:38), going on the strait and narrow way, ever bearing in their body the death of the Lord Jesus. Being co-crucified with Christ, remaining in hunger and thirst and in every suffering of evil, in unceasing prayer and entreaties and tears, and passing their lives in the utter poverty of Christ and the Holy Apostles, and keeping the commandments of the Gospel purely and immaculately as the apple of their eye — they were vouchsafed the Kingdom of Heaven.

And what more shall I say? All the Saints received this Divine fire of God's grace, keeping with all diligence the soul-saving commandments of the Gospel, without doing which, by the Orthodox Faith alone, it is not possible to be saved. The true slaves of Christ, of every rank and calling and in every place of His dominion, thus received salvation.

This fire of the Divine love of Christ, being cast into the earth of your heart through His grace by diligent and attentive reading of certain soul-profiting books,you yourself did receive from His goodness; and thereupon you did hate the world and all that is in the world and conceive the intention to leave the world and labor unto God silently day and night in the unmarried life. Your father, after discovering your intention, strove by every means to divert you from it, and brought every kind of persecution against you, wishing to quench the fire of Divine zeal in your soul; but, with the cooperation of God's grace, you overcame everything by your patience, so that your father himself, despairing of keeping you longer in the world and seeing your firm intention to

leave the world and labor unto God, let you go to the monastery in Kostroma. Remaining there for four years, being inspired to this by God's grace, you were enabled to read a multitude of Patristic books, from reading which you received such profit for the soul that you desired the common life and entreated Christ the Saviour to grant you a true instructor, with the promise that if you found a perfect instructor you would, in accordance with the teaching of St. Basil the Great and St. John of the Ladder and St. Simeon the New Theologian, give yourself over to him in complete obedience of soul and body, hating and renouncing all your desire and will, so as to be trampled upon by everyone in the common life.

Christ, the Seer of hearts, fulfilling this intention of yours and your entreaty concerning it, since in all respects it was good and God-pleasing, gave you a true instructor unto salvation, the reposed Father Theodore of blessed memory. Hearing about him, you travelled to him on the island of Solovki. The Lord returned him to his cœnobitic monastery, and then he had another monastery, a cœnobitic one for women, some seventy miles from his men's monastery; and to this cœnobitic women's monastery in Arzamas you transferred from your previous State-recognized monastery in Kostroma, and there you remained with the holy sisters in complete obedience to this holy man and in the cutting off of your own will and understanding in everything, in accordance with the Divine Scriptures and the tradition and teaching of our Holy Fathers, receiving the teaching from him as from the mouth of God and submitting to him in everything, not as to a man but as to Christ God Himself, confessing to him, when he travelled from his own monastery to visit you, the secrets of your heart as to God Himself, together with all the sisters, and receiving spiritual instruction from him in everything, even the smallest thing.

When you had remained in such obedience in this monastery for three years, your father and instructor came to love you according to God; and likewise all the sisters came to love you, and your spiritual father wished to entrust to you, out of holy obedience, the care for the holy sisters. You did not in the least seek this or wish it; but knowing the power of holy and Divine obedience, and that obedience is life while disobedience is death, even against your will you bent your neck under the good yoke of Christ's obedience, and took upon yourself Christ's light burden of caring for the salvation of the holy sisters who had been gathered in the name of Christ and who gave themselves voluntarily over to you in holy obedience. Taking up this heavy weight, you had a certain hope that not you, but your spiritual father would guide both you and all the

sisters, and that all the weight of guiding the souls of the holy community would lie on him and not on you. And therefore you did pass through holy obedience with unutterable joy, submitting in everything to the holy Father as to God Himself.

And thus, having lived for two years after becoming superior, by God's allowance various and many temptations and infirmities of soul came upon you, and your faith and love toward your spiritual father decreased, together with all the other things which you have revealed to me in detail. After you had lived for two years in such a multiform devastation of soul, your spiritual father and teacher departed from temporal into eternal life; and then the eyes of your soul were opened and you began to realize the emptiness of your soul, and of what an instructor in God you had been deprived. And calling to mind the devastation of your soul which had ensued, you wept and lamented, and all but came into despair from the great grief and sorrow of your heart; and you write to me, praying and entreating with many tears, that I might write you something for spiritual consolation.

Not disdaining your entreaty—even though I have no art at all for writing to anyone, and I am unlearned and unskilled — I write to your worthiness and beg and counsel you not to grieve overmuch or despair concerning the former trial and infirmity of your soul, but, with undoubting hope in God's mercy, to place before God a true beginning of true repentance for the past infirmities, and to repent with your whole heart and soul and entreat forgiveness of His goodness; and He, being a God Who is good and loves mankind, rejoicing in your true repentance, as He has forgiven all sinners who have repented, will forgive you also all your transgressions, without any doubt.

It also comes to my mind, O Honorable Lady, that Christ the Saviour, our true God, when He wished to entrust the world to His chief disciples and Apostles Peter and Paul, so that they might preach in it His Gospel and by their preaching might instruct those who believed in Him in the true knowledge of God and the keeping of His commandments, and so that they might be merciful to sinners and the more easily forgive the transgressions of those who repent — by His Divine and unattainable decrees allowed that Peter should renounce Him three times and Paul should persecute and devastate His Church. And after Peter's true repentance and Paul's miraculous coming to believe in Christ, both of these Holy Apostles, inasmuch as they had known in themselves the weakness of human nature, were therefore most merciful, in the likeness of Christ the Lord, to those who transgressed and truly repented; and as they

bore the burden of everyone on themselves, so also they inspired all to this, saying: *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2). Was it not somewhat in this fashion that Christ the Saviour, by His unsearchable decrees, allowed the above-mentioned trials and infirmities of soul to come upon you also, so that having beheld the more completely for a long time,as in a mirror, the infirmity of your soul and the weakness of human nature, you might learn to bear the infirmities of the weak and might be more inclined to have mercy on them in the spirit of meekness. Therefore, repenting before God, glorify His unfathomable Providence, which most marvelously ordains the salvation of those who fear Him and repent.

But since, All-Honorable Lady, from the reading of Patristic books you did conceive the desire to obtain a true instructor who would instruct you on the path of salvation, and having found such a one with God's help, you did remain with him in true obedience and did keep the holy sisters also in such obedience, and you have also known in very deed and experience the fruits of blessed obedience and the fruits of cursed disobedience — therefore, there is need to write to your worthiness only a little regarding holy obedience.

Divine obedience is something so necessary for the true pleasing of God, that without it it is not at all possible to please God. Therefore, all-holy obedience was planted by God in three places, in the heavens, in paradise, and on earth: in the heavens, among the heavenly powers; in paradise, in the first-created men; and on earth, in the holy disciples and apostles of the Lord. In all three of these places there appeared the fruit of most blessed obedience, and also the fruit of thrice-cursed disobedience.

In the heavens, all the heavenly powers, remaining by their good will in obedience to God, were vouchsafed, being enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to remain eternally in Him. But the devil, being from the Angelic order, by his own free will fell away from obedience, and becoming proud, was cast down from the heavens together with all the fallen-away powers of the same Angelic order who freely obeyed his impious counsel; being deprived of the Divine light, they became darkness by their own will, and were made eternally enemies of God and of the salvation of right-believing Christians. Behold how the fruit both of obedience and of disobedience was manifested in the heavens.

In paradise, as long as the first-created ones remained in true obedience to God, they took sweet enjoyment in beholding God face to face and in multiform gifts of the Holy Spirit. But when of their own free will, obeying the

counsel of the devil and falling away from obedience, they became proud, desiring to be equal to God, then they received the sentence of death from God and were banished from paradise, and were the cause of death for the whole human race. And if the Son of God by His obedience unto death to God the Father had not destroyed the disobedience of Adam, there would have remained for the human race no hope at all for salvation from death and eternal perdition. Behold how in paradise, in the first-created ones, the fruit of obedience and of disobedience was shown.

On earth, Christ the Son of God, having come down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of the Father Who sent Him, to Whom He was obedient unto death, the death of the Cross, planted His Divine obedience in His holy disciples and Apostles. Remaining in it even unto death, they were enabled by their preaching to bring the world to the knowledge of God, and now with Christ their Lord and Teacher they reign in the heavens. But the thrice-cursed Judas, who fell away from obedience and in place of the Lord obeyed in all things the devil, fell into despair, hanged himself, and perished eternally with soul and body. Behold how on earth the fruit of obedience and of disobedience was manifested.

This Divine obedience, planted by Christ God Himself in His holy disciples, passed over to the holy Angelic monastic order, in which many shone forth like the sun in holy obedience and pleased God perfectly. And, indeed, the whole monastic order is founded upon holy obedience; and in ancient times, whether in the common life, or in the royal way (that is, where two or three are together), or in the deserts, for the greater part they began their life with obedience, and thus by God's grace they escaped demonic deceptions. But for those who have begun the monastic life in a self-willed manner there have often followed many demonic deceptions, from which may the Lord deliver us by His grace.

Divine obedience, therefore, is greatly to be praised, as it is, according to the teaching of St. John of the Ladder and other Holy Fathers, the mother of the foundation of all the Gospel commandments, namely, love, which is made perfect by obedience, as the Lord has said: *If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments.* And again:*He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.* And again:*He that loveth Me not keepeth not My words* (John 14:15, 21, 24). And the keeping of God's commandments and His words is nothing else than perfect obedience toward Christ the Lord.. Divine obedience is such a great virtue before God that, according to the com-

The Monastery of Niamets, seen from inside the walls

mon teaching of many Saints, true doers of obedience, who have remained to the end of their life in true obedience, receive a martyr's crown from Christ the Lord; for the cutting off of their own will and understanding in everything before the superior is reckoned by Christ, in the day of His righteous rewarding according to deeds, as a mental and voluntary shedding of blood for His name.

Therefore, O Honorable Lady, keep the community of the holy sisters in such a Divine and holy and thrice-blessed obedience, not otherwise than according to the true understanding of the Divine Scriptures as it is handed down and taught by our holy and God-bearing Fathers; instruct them on the path of salvation, presenting yourself to them, being strengthened by God's help, as an example of every good work, with a diligent fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel, with love for God and neighbor, with meekness and humility, always with the most profound peace of Christ toward all, with a motherly mercifulness toward them, with patience and longsuffering, with tearful entreaty and consolation, inspiring them to every good work, bearing with the love of God all their burdens and infirmities, burning with love of God for them as for sisters and disciples of Christ, diligently instructing them in true obedience to God in all things and in the cutting off, and even more the mortification of their opposing will and of the working of their mind and understanding. But consider yourself, in the secret place of your heart and soul, as dust and ashes before God, as evil and sinful above all others. Force yourself to offer yourself as an example to the holy sisters also in the keeping of the commandments of the holy Fathers and in bodily labors according to your strength, if

you are able, in standing at the rule of prayer in church, in prostrations and bows. Further, perform the cell rule established by the holy Fathers in the fear of God, with prayers and psalmody and reading. Likewise, read diligently and with great heedfulness and testing the Patristic books on prayer performed by the mind alone in the heart, which is the truest and most God-pleasing monastic labor; and if with God's assistance you understand the true meaning of it from the teaching of the holy Fathers, then force yourself also to do it, calling on God for help, and you will obtain from it great profit for your soul. Force yourself to judge no one; for there is only one righteous Judge, Christ the Lord, Who will give to each according to his works; but only judge yourself and you will not be judged at His terrible second coming. Forgive with your whole heart the transgressions of any who have sinned against you, so that your Heavenly Father may forgive you your transgressions. And what more shall I say? Constantly force yourself with your whole soul to fulfill all the commandments of the Gospel, having all your hope for the salvation of your soul in God's mercy alone, without any doubting. For your previous infirmities and transgressions of soul, which have occurred by God's allowance, may God forgive you by His grace and love for mankind, and may He bless you, both in this age and in the age to come.

As for writing to me: write with all boldness, and for the Lord's sake I entreat you, write to me, unworthy as I am, in detail about your common life, and the church and refectory rule, and your food, and the whole ordering of your life. May the Lord Jesus Christ our true God, Who said, where there are two or three gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them, by the prayers of His Most Holy Mother, our Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and of all the Saints, be in the midst of you who have gathered in His Most Holy Name, unto the ages. Amen.

The unworthy entreater of God and all-fervent wisher of the complete flourishing in the Gospel commandments of Your Honorableness with all the holy sisters gathered in the name of Christ,

Archimandrite Paisius
of the Holy Niamets Monastery of the Ascension and
the Sekoul Monastery of the Forerunner, Moldavia.

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